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IDENTIFIERS

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ABSTRACT

800 800 A GROUP OF 14-YEAR-OLD GIRLS FROM WORKING CLASS HOMES WHO WERE
801 801 RECOMMENDED BY THEIR SCHOOL COUNSELORS PARTICIPATED IN A STORY
802 802 READING PROGRAM DESIGNED TO IMPROVE THE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF
803 803 DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN 1 1/2 TO 2 1/2 YEARS OLD. FOR 20 MINUTES A
804 804 DAY, 5 DAYS A WEEK, FOR 8 MONTHS EACH GIRL MET WITH EACH OF HER FOUR
805 805 PARTICULAR CHILDREN AND INTERESTED THE CHILDREN IN EITHER
806 806 READING-MATERIALS OR TOYS. THE READER ENCOURAGED THE CHILDREN TO
807 807 VERBALIZE AND KEPT A DAILY RECORD OF EACH OF THE CHILDREN SHE
808 808 VISITED. LONGER ATTENTION SPANS AND INTEREST IN BOOKS AND READING AS
809 809 AN ACTIVITY WERE THE GOALS OF THE PROJECT. ADULT SUPERVISION
810 810 INCLUDED BRIEF DAILY CONTACT WITH THE READERS AND HOME VISITS TO
811 811 OBSERVE AND MAKE CONTACT WITH THE MOTHERS. TRAINING SESSIONS, WHICH
812 812 EMPHASIZED THE CHARACTERISTICS OF 2-YEAR-OLDS, THE IMPORTANCE OF
813 813 READING, AND TECHNIQUES FOR ESTABLISHING RAPPORT, WERE HELD FOR A
814 814 2-HOUR PERIOD EVERY AFTERNOON FOR THE 2 WEEKS PRECEDING THE
815 815 PROJECT'S INITIATION. THE SELECTION OF SUITABLE GIRLS FOR READERS
816 816 WOULD BE A PRIMARY CONSIDERATION IF A SECOND PROJECT WERE PLANNED.
817 817 A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS USED IN THE PROGRAM IS INCLUDED.
818 818 THE DOCUMENT ALSO CONTAINS 13 PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE GIRLS WORKING WITH
819 819 THE CHILDREN. (MS)

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CORNELL STORY READING PROGRAM

by
Mrs. Eleanor D. Macklin
Dr. John Harding
Dr. Eugene Fodor

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Cornell Research Program in Early Childhood Education
(A research and development center of
the National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education.)

Dr. John Harding
Director, Story Reading Program

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CORNELL STORY READING PROGRAM

Ever since attractively illustrated children's books became available at low prices, middle class American mothers have been reading stories to their children. Is this story-reading one of the reasons for the rapid language development of the average middle class child? Researchers at Cornell University thought perhaps it was. They decided, therefore, to make a study of the effects on the language development of disadvantaged children who had books read to them systematically over an extended period of time.

Children selected for the research project are between 1 1/2 and 2 1/2 years old, because this is the age when language development is first beginning to blossom. Books are read to them in their own homes, or in the homes of baby sitters, for 20 minutes a day, five days a week, for the eight or more months that the program lasts. During the readings, the children are lying on beds, snuggled on sofas, cuddled on laps, or seated properly at tables. Because two-year-olds thrive on familiar routines, generally arrangements are made to have the books read to them at the same time of day, and the children assume the same positions.

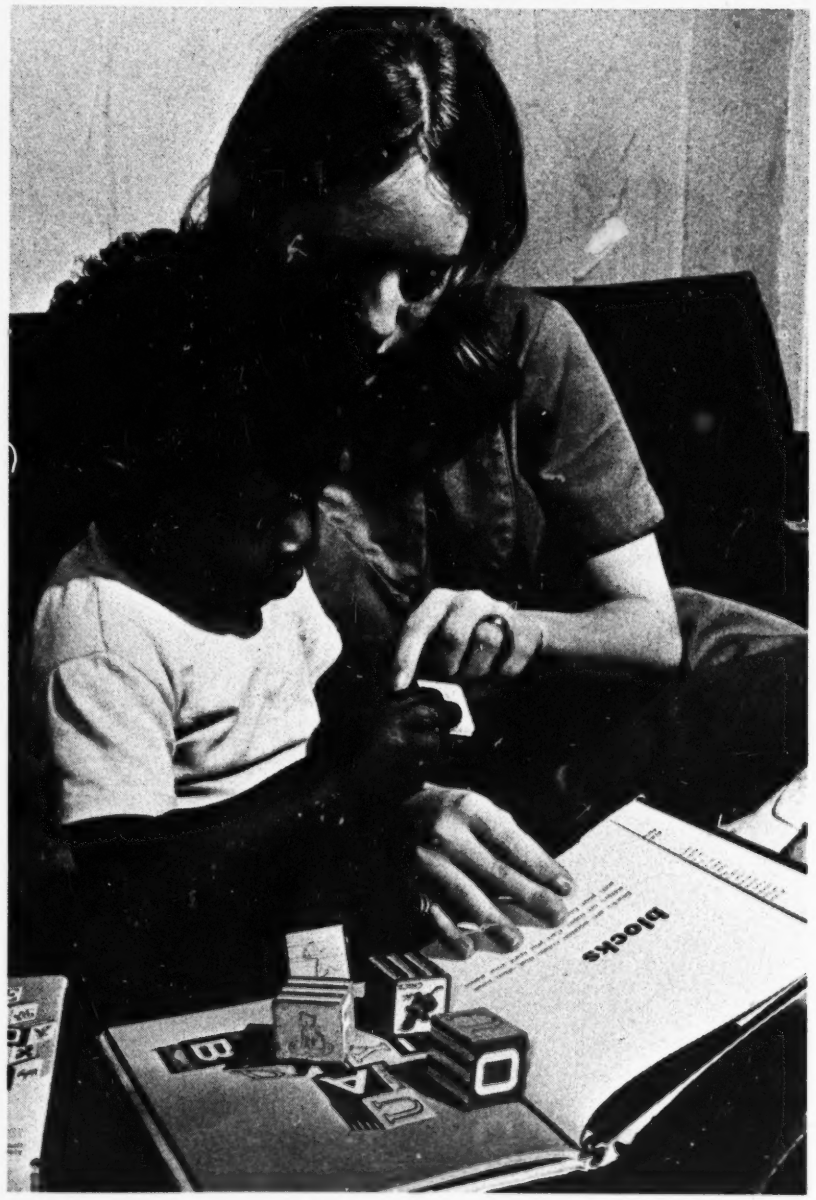
"Reading" may be a somewhat misleading term for what is done. Actually, much of the "storybook reading" consists, at first, almost entirely of what might better be called "picture talk." Rather than reading the specific words printed on the page, the reader shows the child the pictures and ad libs about them--names the objects,

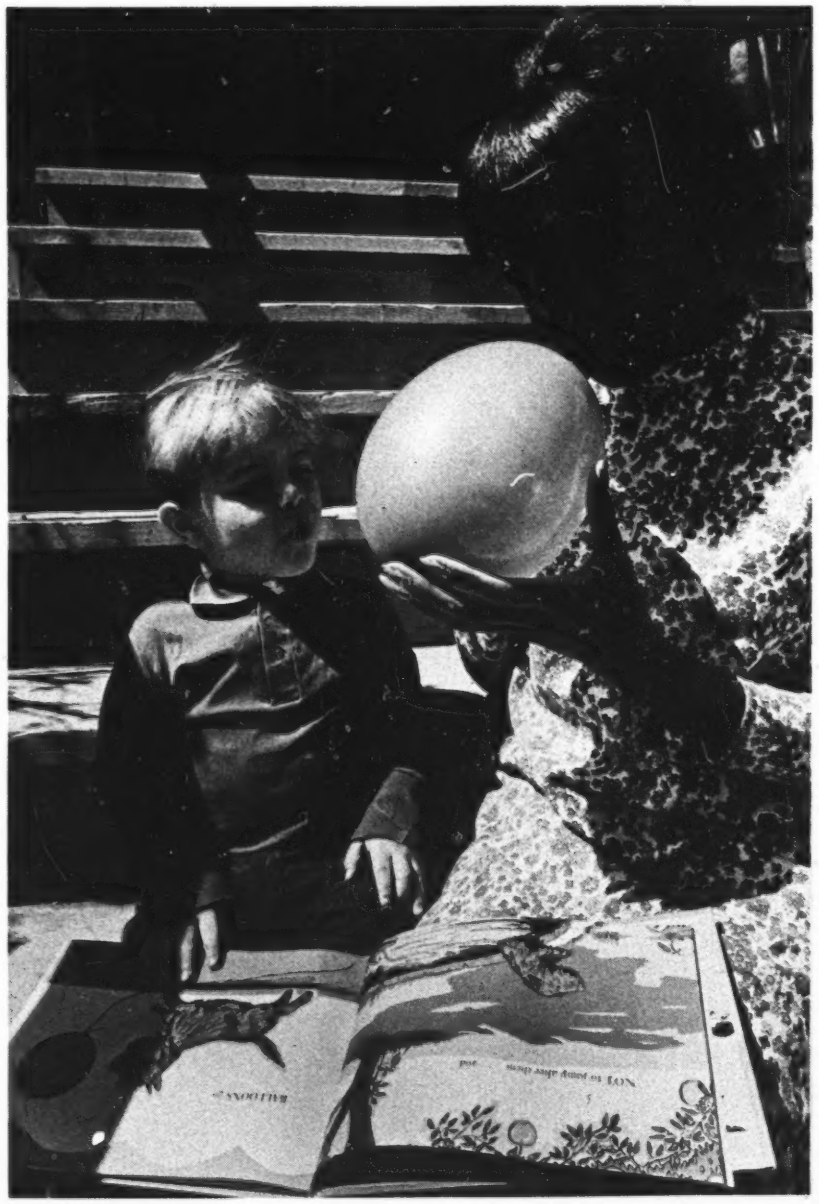
comments on them, and, where possible, relates them to concrete objects. Even when the child progresses to stories, the story is first told in terms appropriate to the child rather than read verbatim from the book.

Much emphasis is given to eliciting verbalization from the child. The children are encouraged to repeat words after the reader and to name objects in the pictures and are praised vigorously when they do so. As the child progresses, effort is made to get him to talk about what is happening in the pictures, with emphasis put on sentence development rather than mere one- or two-word utterances.

When a reader begins to work with a child for the first time, her primary concern is to make him feel comfortable with her, to arouse his interest in books, and to maintain his attention. To accomplish this, she comes prepared with numerous devices, all tucked away in a rainproof bookbag appliquéd with gay pictures. In addition to a selection of appropriate books, there are the many "fun things," like "Pepper" (a handmade alligator hand puppet with whom the child can eventually converse), or the little truck which rolls down an empty paper-towel tube, or an improvised train made of old garters, which not only "toots," but couples and uncouples.

For some of the youngest children who cannot at first sit still for 20 minutes, there are toys like poppet beads or ring stacks to be interspersed with reading. Always there are play items which have been selected because they relate directly to the pictures: blocks, a





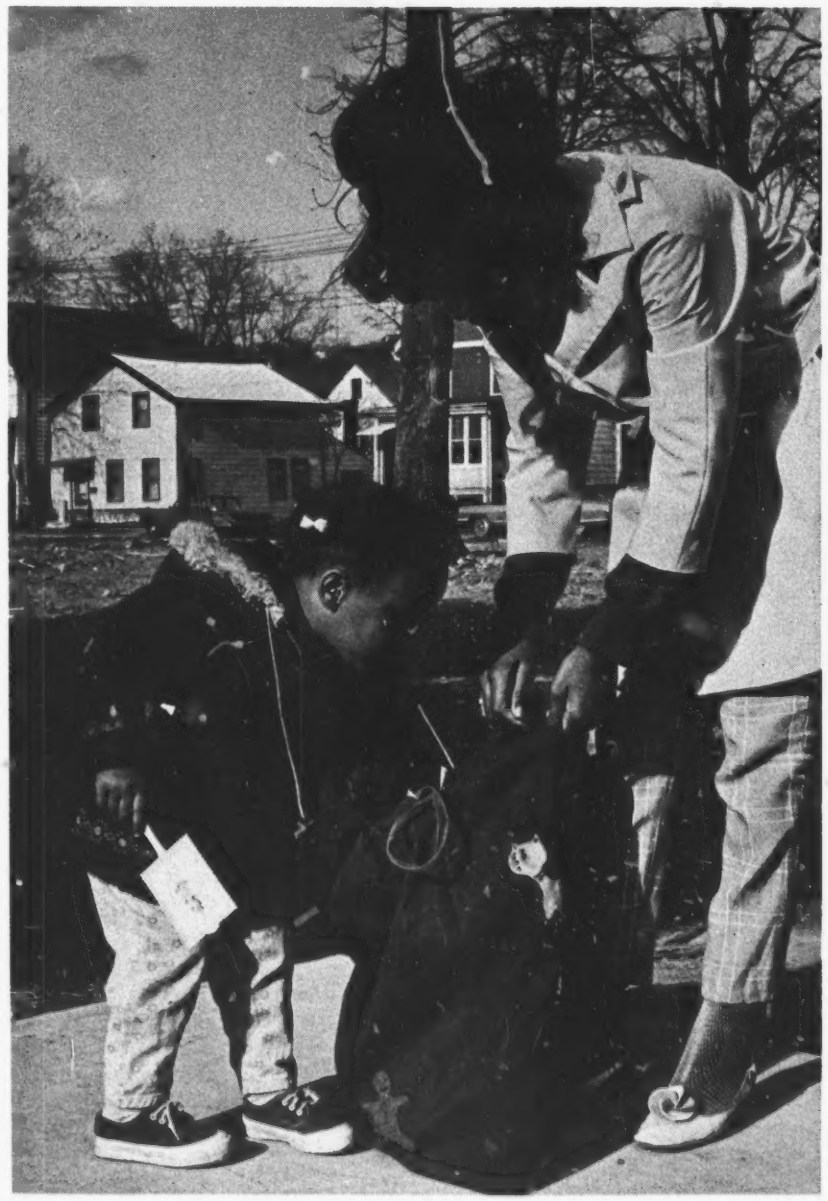
slateboard with chalk and eraser, a band-aid box of marbles, or maybe a balloon or some plastic zoo animals--toys which can be used both to illustrate the pictures and to draw a distracted child back to the book ("look, here's a picture of a red balloon--just like your red balloon"). For the child who sits better if he holds something, there might be a Gumby or Raggedy Ann doll and perhaps something to munch on, like a little box of raisins or flavored cereal bits or some M&M's or maybe a lollipop.

Although most children need these aids only during the first few weeks, everyone--child and reader alike--enjoys a special "something different" from time to time. So there are such things as pumpkin candles at

Halloween (which can also be used to teach about fire and matches); flannel boards with paper cutouts, used to introduce stories such as the Gingerbread Man (the boards made out of hinged masonite to last the wear and tear, and the cutouts covered with clear contact paper); single-piece puzzles of modes of transportation and of animals; a wooden shape sorting box; crayons and felt pens; and a pack of picture flash cards.

If occasionally, in spite of all the above, it proves impossible to maintain the child's attention on a particular day, one might spend part or all of the time looking at things out a window, or cuddling and singing songs, or doing finger plays, or taking a walk, or whatever the child seems interested in. Flexibility, empathy with the child, and making the reader's visit a fun time are the rule. Over and over the reader must remind herself that what is most important is verbalizing--talking about the child's environment, attaching words to things and feelings, and getting the child to begin to express himself; they can talk about the tree out the window as well as about the tree in the book, if such should seem more appropriate that day.

To do the reading, 14-year-old Negro and white girls from working class homes were selected. Recommended initially by school guidance counselors, they were selected, after interviews and reference checks, on the basis of apparent reliability, likelihood of positive interaction with children, desire to have a regular afterschool job, willingness to work in both Negro and white homes, and residential proximity to the areas where the children lived.



Training sessions were held for a two-hour period every afternoon for the two weeks immediately preceding initiation of the project. Training emphasized the characteristics of two-year-olds, ways to work with young children, the importance of reading to young children, principles to be followed while reading, and techniques for establishing rapport. Much time was devoted to providing supervised experience in reading to young children--first, in a one-way vision room in front of the other readers and, later, during several sessions at local Head Start centers. In each case, the reader was assigned to a two-year-old whom she had not met before. She was asked to maintain his interest for 20 minutes while initiating some contact with a book.

The girls who were to be regular readers were each assigned four children within their own geographic areas, and they were to read to these children every afternoon after school. Several others were assigned to serve as general floaters and substitute readers. The readers were expected to walk to the children's homes, regardless of weather or competing attractions, to notify the supervisor if they were unable to work because of illness or some similar emergency, to arrange for substitutes to take their places when they took a day off, to keep a daily record of each of their children and of the hours worked and to plan the day-to-day curriculum for each of their children. In return, they were paid $1.50 an hour.

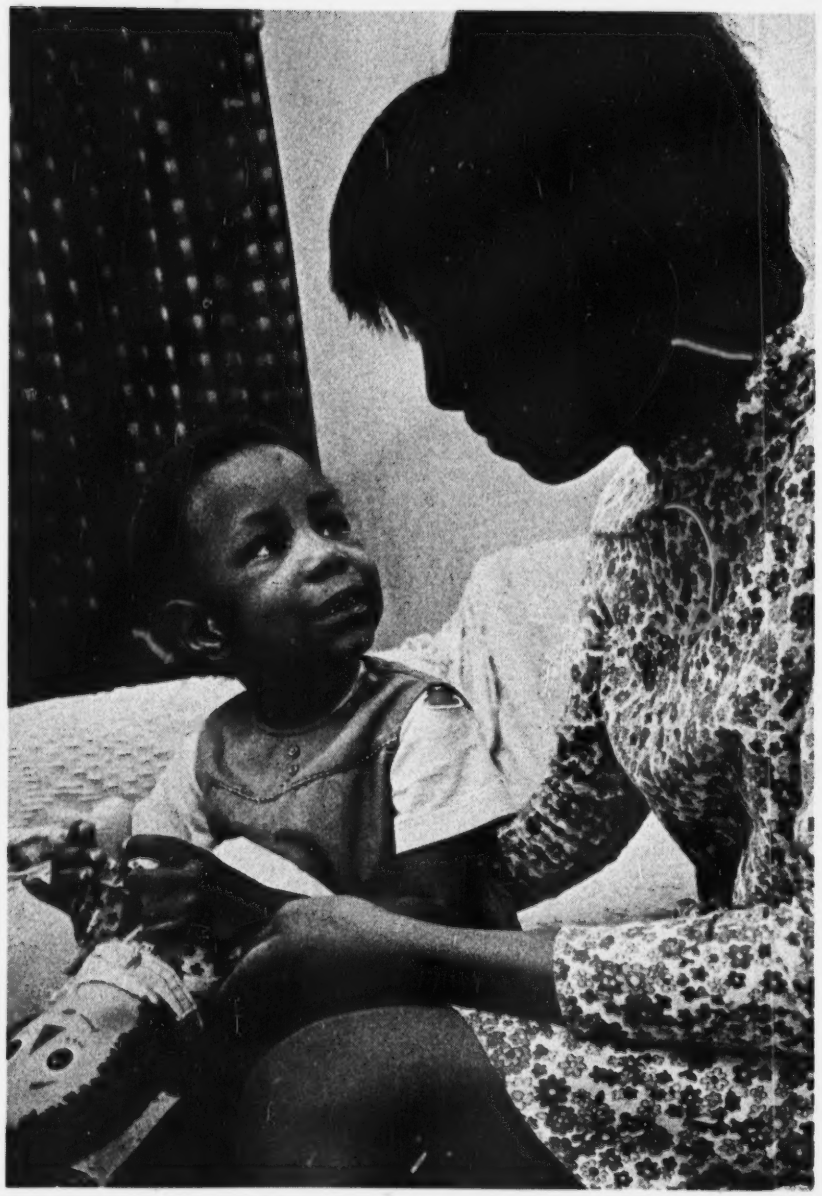
Fairly close supervision was provided. The supervisor met with the readers for a few minutes each afternoon after school to receive verbal reports about the children visited the previous day, to give out new mate-

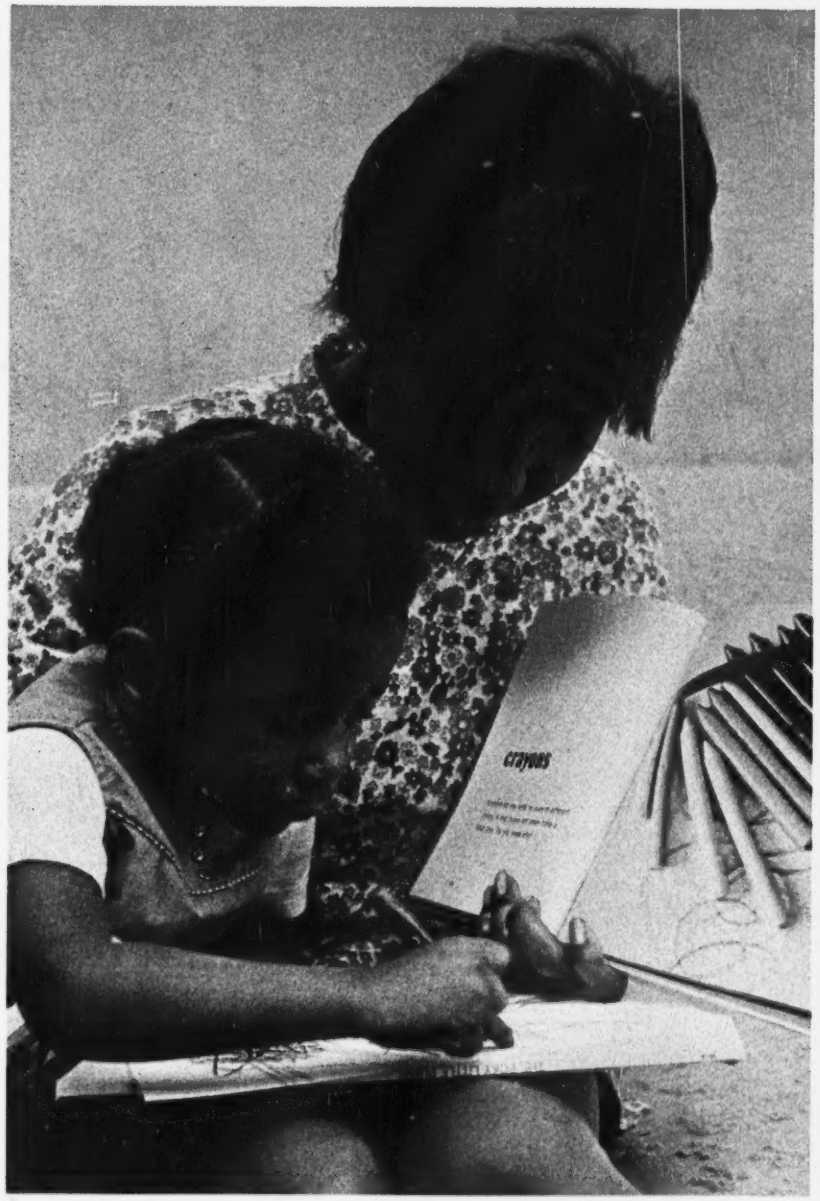
rials and forms, to collect records, and to check on reader attendance. Two or three times a month, each reader was accompanied by an adult observer, who sought to help her with any problems she was encountering and to suggest more effective ways of working with her children. Mothers of the two-year-olds were asked to keep daily records of the reading, and home visits were made weekly to receive and discuss them.

Anyone considering a similar project should be well aware of the problems involved, as well as the dividends, which accrue with both children and teenagers. Problems can be divided into two categories: (a) those related to the children and the environments in which the reading was done, and (b) those related to utilizing teenagers as readers.

(a) It took awhile for the mothers of the two-year-olds to learn to rearrange their schedules so that the child was always available for readings. At first, children would often be napping when the reader arrived or would fall asleep while being read to because they had not napped; often they would not even be at home. The home environment itself frequently posed a problem, with the distraction of television and other activity in the often compact quarters, siblings who wished to be included, and an occasional physically unpleasant situation.

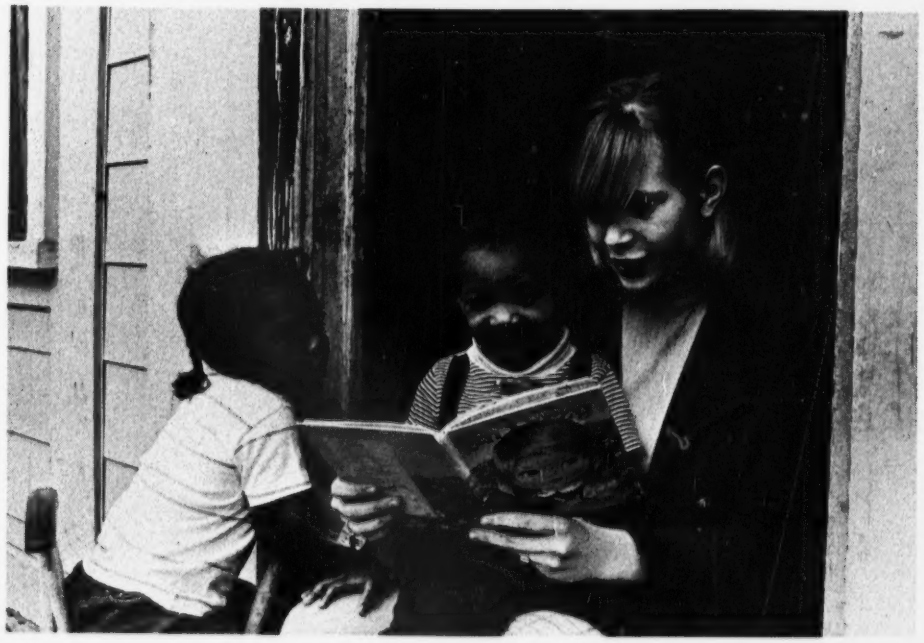
Some of the most dramatic changes which occurred during the reading period were in the child's attitude toward books and reading, in his ability to handle books, and in his ability to sit and pay attention for prolonged periods of time. However, at the beginning

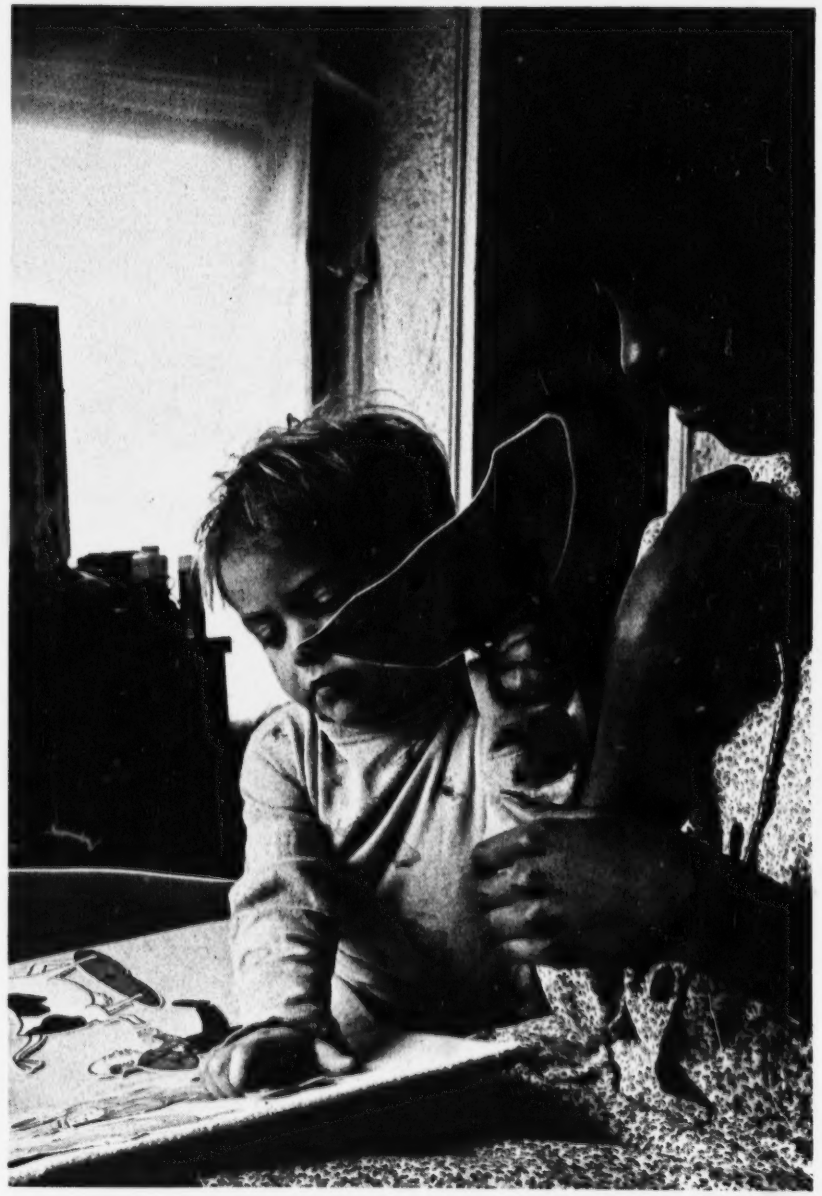




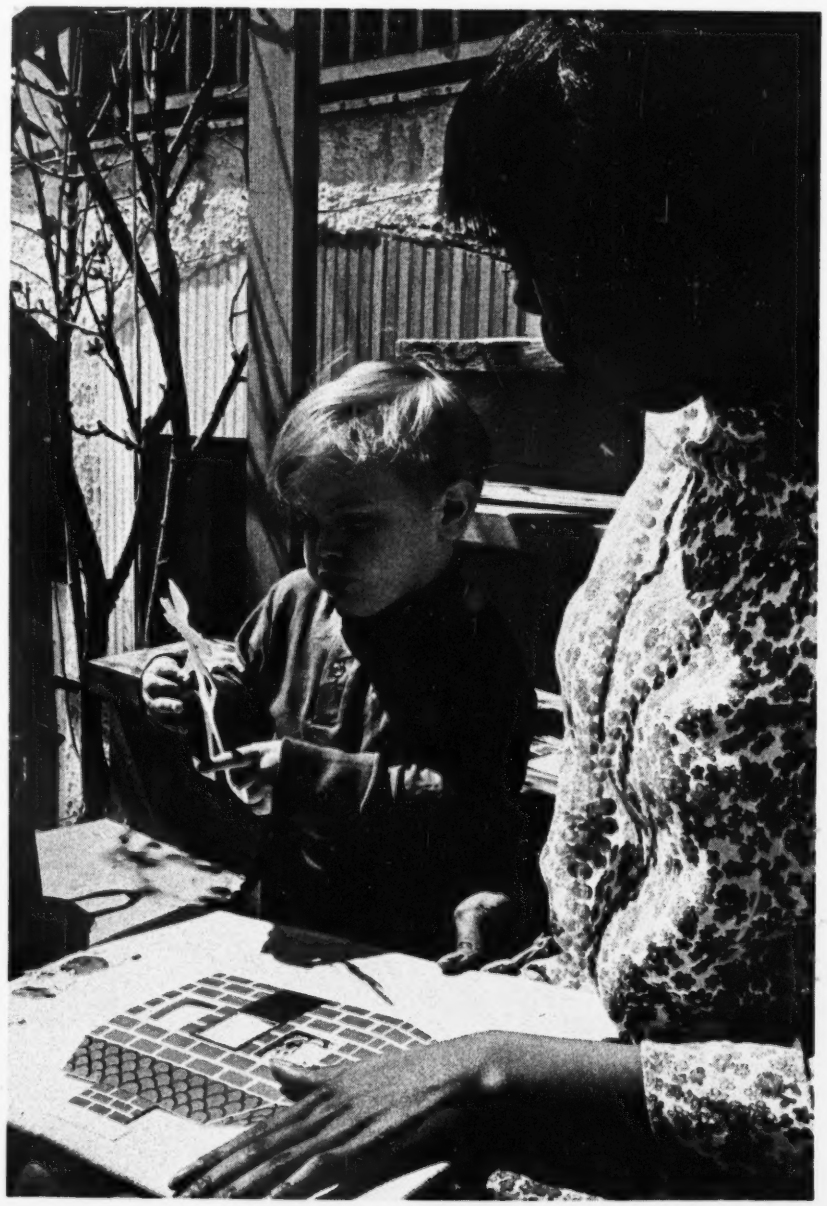
of the program the normal characteristics of a two-year-old posed difficulties; for instance, the desire for autonomy, the short attention span, the unintelligible speech, or the immature coordination often led to frustration. Frequently the children found it hard to control their activity level, their language development was often retarded severely, and they sometimes lacked the breadth of experience which would immediately make the pictures meaningful. However, these problems might be expected in working with children who have come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

(b) Anyone who plans to hire young teenagers must be prepared to deal with some relatively universal characteristics of this age group which may initially interfere





with a work situation of this type; for instance, the strong attachment to peers, which means that they find it hard to have to work alone and to give up doing things with their friends in the afternoon; or the fact that they have never worked before, which means that they must learn the rudiments of what is expected of an employee (e.g., that one comes properly equipped to go to work, that unexcused absenteeism is unacceptable, and that one reports to work on time and tends strictly to business while working). Young adolescents are typically insecure and, hence, tend to be somewhat defensive and sensitive to criticism. There is a common tendency to resent adult authority and to see the adult supervisor as being "on the other side of the fence." A person supervising adolescents, therefore, must at times deal with



the attitude that he is unfair, unduly suspicious, and lacking in understanding. Teenage employees are apt to test the limits to see how much or how little they can get away with. (This conduct, however, is as characteristic of our culture as it is of teenagers.) In the case of the teenage readers, their particular backgrounds may cause some of them to question the value of books and reading, and they may lack the necessary verbal facility and knowledge to explain things accurately in terms a young child can understand.

Much of the above can be resolved. It will probably require, however, judicious initial selection; careful training, both before and while on the job (for the more effective they are, the more rewarding the relationship with the child and, hence, the greater the motivation to go to work and to do a good job); close supervision; explicit and repeated statement of expected behavior; praise for work well done; a continual effort to be fair and a willingness to patiently explain and re-explain the reasons for a particular rule or decision; and, above all, a fondness for young people and a respect for their abilities, a ready sense of humor, and an emotional resiliency which allows one to operate on the assumption that although today was a problem, tomorrow will be better. During the second year of a program, it would probably be well to involve the best of the previous year's readers in the recruitment, training, and supervision of the new readers.

Books Used in Cornell Storybook Reading Project
(Inexpensive books for use with 18-40 month old disadvantaged children)

Series #1

1. Baby's First Toys. Platt and Munk, Inc., 200 Fifth Avenue., New York, N. Y. 10010, $1.25
2. Baby's Things. Platt and Munk, Inc., op. cit., $1.25 (used for testing)
3. Baby's First ABC (Words To Say). Platt and Munk, Inc., op. cit., $1.25
4. Baby's First Counting Book. Platt and Munk, Inc., op. cit., $1.25
5. My First Book. Platt and Munk, Inc., op. cit., $1.50
6. Things To See by Thomas Matthiesen. Platt and Munk, Inc., op. cit., $2.50
7. Happy Animals Panorama. McLoughlin Brothers, Inc., 51 Madison Avenue, N. Y., N. Y. 10010 (Grosset and Dunlap). $1.00
8. Pat The Bunny by Dorothy Kinhardt, 1940. Golden Press, Western Publishing Co., 150 Parish Drive, Wayne, New Jersey, 07470 $1.95
9. The Touch Me Book by Pat and Eve Witte, 1961. Golden Press, op. cit., $1.95
10. Who Lives Here? by Pat and Eve Witte, 1961. Golden Press, op. cit., $1.95
11. Busy Timmy. A Golden Giant Sturdy Book. Golden Press, op. cit., $1.50
12. Where's My Baby? by H. A. Rey. Houghton-Mifflin Co., 2 Park St., Boston, Mass. 02107, $1.00

Series #2

1. A Tale of Tails by Elizabeth H. MacPherson, 1962. Big Golden Book, Golden Press, op. cit., $1.00
2. Big and Little by Joe Kaufman, 1966. Big Golden Book. Golden Press, op. cit., $1.00
3. Old MacDonald Had a Farm by Mel Crawford. Golden Square Book. Golden Press, op. cit., $1.00
4. I Am a Mouse by Ole Risom, 1964. A Happy Golden Book. Golden Press, op. cit., $1.00 (Golden Sturdy Happy Book--$1.95)
5. The Truck and Bus Book. A Golden Shape Book. Golden Press, op. cit., $.29
6. Homes (A Happy Nursery Book) by Virginia Parsons. Doubleday and Co., Inc., 501 Franklin Ave., Garden City, New Jersey 11531, $1.00
7. Santa Claus Book, A Golden Shape Book. Golden Press, op. cit., $.29
8. Night Before Christmas by Florence Sarah Winship. Whitman Publishing Co., 1220 Mound Avenue, Racine, Wisc. 53404, $.29
9. Down Mother Goose Lane, 1964. Ideals Publishing Co., 11315 Watertown Plank Road, Milwaukee, Wisc. 53291, $.60

10. Best Word Book Ever by Richard Scarry. Golden Press, op. cit., $3.95
11. I'm Suzy by Dorthea Ruthstrom, 1966. Big Tell-a-Tale. Whitman Publishing Co., op. cit., $.29
12. Is This the House of Mistress Mouse? by Richard Scarry. Golden Press, op., cit., $1.95

Series #3

1. Great Big Fire Engine Book by Tibor Gergely. Big Golden Book. Golden Press, op. cit., $1.00
2. The Big Red Bus by Ethel and Leonard Kessler, 1957. Doubleday and Co., Inc., op. cit., $3.25
3. Giant Nursery Book of Things That Go by George J. Zaffo. Doubleday and Co., Inc., op. cit., $3.50
4. Papa Small by Lois Lenski. Henry Z. Walck, Inc. 19 Union Square W., N. Y., N. Y. 10003. $2.75
5. The Little Farm by Lois Lenski. Walck, op. cit., $2.75
6. Policeman Small by Lois Lenski. Walck, op. cit., $2.75
7. The Golden Egg Book by Margaret Brown. Big Golden Book. Golden Press, op. cit., $1.00
8. Are You My Mother? by P. D. Eastman, 1960. Beginner Books, 457 Madison Avenue, N. Y., N. Y. 10022 (Random House) $1.95
9. The Snowy Day by Ezra Keats, 1962. Viking Press, 625 Madison Avenue, N. Y., N. Y. 10022, $3.00
10. Good Night Moon by Margaret Brown. Harper and Row, 2500 Crawford Avenue, Evanston, Illinois 60201, $2.95
11. The Noisy Book by Margaret Brown. Harper and Row, op. cit., $2.95
12. Angus and the Cat by Marjorie Flack, 1931. Doubleday, op. cit., $1.00

Series #4

1. The Three Bears by Helen Rowland. Tell-a-Tale Book. Whitman Publishing Co., op. cit., $.19
2. Peter Rabbit by Florence Sarah Winship. Tell-a-Tale Book. Whitman Publishing Co., op. cit., $.29
3. The Gingerbread Man by Elfrieda. Big Tell-a-Tale Book. Whitman Publishing Co., op. cit., $.29
4. The Three Little Pigs by Elizabeth Ross. Big Tell-a-Tale Book. Whitman Publishing Co., op. cit., $.29
5. Chicken Little by Marjorie Hartwell. Tell-a-Tale Book. Whitman Publishing Co., op. cit., $.19
6. Little Red Riding Hood by Mabel Watts and Kelly Oechsli. Big Tell-a-Tale Book. Whitman Publishing Co., op. cit., $.29
7. Little Red Hen by Evelyn Begley and Carl and Mary Hauge. Big Tell-a-Tale Book. Whitman Publishing Co., op. cit., $.29
8. My Color Game by Evelyn M. Begley. Big Tell-a-Tale Book. Whitman Publishing Co., op. cit., $.29
9. Hey! Let's Go! by Joan Potter Elwart. Big Tell-a-Tale Book. Whitman Publishing Co., op. cit., $.29
10. A Story About Me by Norma Knoche & Eileen Daly. Big Tell-a-Tale Book. Whitman Publ. Co., op. cit., $.29

11. Mother Goose Rhymes. Platt and Munk, Inc. 200 Fifth Avenue, N. Y., N. Y. 10010, $1.95
12. The Pokey Little Puppy. Big Golden Book. Golden Press, op. cit., $1.00

Series #5

1. Poems to Read to the Very Young by Josette Frank, 1961. Random House, 457 Madison Avenue, N. Y., N. Y. 10022, $1.00
2. My First Picture Book by Leonard Weisgard. Grosset and Dunlap, 51 Madison Avenue., N. Y., N. Y. 10010, $1.00
3. The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper. Platt and Munk, op. cit., $1.50
4. Caps For Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina, 1947. W. R. Scott, Inc., 333 Ave. of the Americas, N.Y. , N. Y. 10014, $2.75
5. Barney's Adventure by Margot Austin. E. P. Dutton, Inc., 201 Park Ave., So., N. Y., N. Y. 10003, $2.95
6. Smokey the Bear. Big Golden Book. Golden Press, op. cit., $1.00
7. Curious George by H. A. Rey, 1941. Houghton-Mifflin Co., op. cit., $3.25
8. Harry the Dirty Dog by Gene Zion. Harper and Row, op. cit., $3.25

Additional Books Used Where Appropriate (one copy each)

1. First ABC by Nancy Larrick, 1965. Platt and Munk, op. cit., $2.95
2. You On the Farm by Leon Jason, 1967. McGraw Hill Book Co., 330 W. 42nd Street, N. Y., N. Y. 10036, $2.00
3. Rain (A Happy Nursery Book) by Virginia Parsons, 1961. Doubleday, op. cit., $1.00
4. The Birthday Present by Bruno Munari, 1959. World Publishing Co., 2231 W. 110th Street, Cleveland, Ohio 44102, $2.00
5. Ask Mr. Bear by Marjorie Flack, 1932. Macmillan (Crowell, Collier and Macmillan, 866 Third Avenue, N. Y., N. Y. 10022) $2.95
6. Katy No-Pocket by Emmy Payne, 1944. Houghton-Mifflin, op. cit., $3.50
7. Old Mother Hubbard by Anne Sellers Leaf. A Rand McNally Junior Elf Book. Rand McNally and Co., Box 7600, Chicago, Illinois 60680, $.19
8. Everybody Has a House and Everybody Eats by Mary McBurney Green, 1961. N. Y.: Young Scott Books (W. R. Scott, Co., op. cit.) $3.50
9. Romper Room Book of Finger Plays and Action Rhymes by June Pierce. Wonder Books (Grosset and Dunlap, 51 Madison Ave., N. Y., N. Y. 10010) $.35